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UNCLAS LJUBLJANA 000275

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ROMA EDUCATION DISPUTE RESOLVED TEMPORARILY

1. Summary. Slovenia's Minister of Education and Sport has recently made two visits to Novo Mesto in south-east Slovenia to address a dispute over the education of Roma children in that community. A temporary solution has been found which will place those children needing extra assistance in special classes. This action does not solve the fundamental problems of education in the Roma community, and it has been criticized as creating a two-tier system, which would further disadvantage Roma students. While the temporary solution is acknowledged to be imperfect, this relatively balanced response from the government can be seen as a sign that the GOS is committed to increasing integration into Slovene society of the Roma community. End Summary.

2. The current situation resulted when parents of a Roma primary school student arrived at the school to physically settle a score with a teacher who allegedly had poorly treated the Roma child. At the same time, parents of non-Roma children (the majority at the school) were insisting that the Roma students, who were concentrated in this primary school, be distributed evenly among all Novo Mesto schools. There were threats to boycott classes until this change would be effected. Of the 626 students enrolled in the school, 86 are Roma.

3. When Minister Zver announced he would travel to the city on 9 March to mediate, the boycott was averted. He also refused to relocate the Roma students to other schools, as this would be a violation of the law. His short-term solution was to create separate classes for language and math for those students needing remedial instruction. This move was initially interpreted by the parents of the Roma students as an attempt at segregation, which led them to boycott classes and prompted another visit by the Minister on 6 April. In this visit, the Minister was able to persuade the parents that the measures were temporary and designed to integrate students into regular classes. Zver also said students would not be placed in the classes based on their ethnicity. Accordingly, 25 of the 86 Roma children will remain fulltime in regular classes. He vowed to monitor progress, and if the new arrangement proved ineffective, pledged to replace it.

4. Comment. As with most of its European neighbors, Slovenia continues to struggle with how to best integrate its Roma community into the mainstream of society. The flare-up over integration in schools in Novo Mesto highlights that there is still some ways to go to get this part of the equation right. There are good models already in Slovenia, which could be a basis for a permanent solution. In the north-east region of Prekmurje, the Roma community has more successfully integrated into local society including in education. The Government of Slovenia has put drafting an umbrella act on the Roma on its agenda for 2005 and will attempt to address the problems that have plagued it most of its recent history: education, living conditions and unemployment. End Comment

Robertson

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